

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-13

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INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6560

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USINT CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 2931

BEIRUT PASS TO DAMASCUS AND BAGHDAD

STATE ALSO FOR T/IEP

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ENRG, PFOR, FR, XF

SUBJECT: FRENCH VIEWS ON THE MIDDLE EAST

1. SUMMARY. ACCORDING TO THE QUAI, FONMIN JOBERT'S TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST WAS PRIMARILY POLITICAL IN PURPOSE. JOBERT'S COMMENTS ON PALESTINIANS DO NOT INDICATE ANY CHANGE IN THE FRENCH POSITION BUT HE MAY MEET WITH ARAFAT. QUAI OFFICIAL ASSERTED THAT FRENCE WOULD DO NOTHING TO IMPEDE THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS AND THOUGHT SYRIA WOULD EVENTUALLY PARTICIPATE. HE CONFIRMED JOBERT'S TRIP TO
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IRAQ AND PLANS FOR SUBSEQUENT VISITS TO THE MIDDLE EAST,

SOMEWHAT DOWN-PLAYING PROSPECTS FOR AN ISRAELI STOP. FRANCE STILL WANTS BADLY TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. WE DISCUSSED FOREIGN MINISTER JOBERT'S RECENT TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST WITH QUAI DESK OFFICER FOR ISRAEL AND JORDAN DE LA BELLEISSUE JANUARY 31. HE APOLOGIZED FOR NOT YET BEING ABLE TO GIVE A DETAILED WRAP-UP, SAYING HE HAD SEEN ONLY FRAGMENTARY REPORTS BUT THAT HE WAS FULLY CONVERSANT WITH BRIEFING PAPERS PREPARED FOR THE TRIP. HE UNDERLINED THAT CONTRARY TO PRESS INTERPRETATIONS, JOBERT'S PRIMARY OBJECTIVE WAS POLITICAL, NOT ECONOMIC OR MILITARY. ALTHOUGH THERE HAD BEEN DISCUSSIONS OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND OTHER NON-POLITICAL MATTERS, JOBERT'S MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO REASSURE THE ARABS OF FRENCH (AND EUROPEAN) INTEREST IN THEM AND TO REITERATE THE LONG-STANDING FRENCH VIEW THAT EUROPE MUST PLAY A ROLE IN ANY MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT.

3. RESPONDING TO OUR QUERY WHETHER PRESS REPORTS ABOUT JOBERT'S COMMENTS ON THE PALESTINIANS REFLECTED ANY CHANGE IN THE FRENCH POSITION TOWARD THE PALESTINIANS, DE LA BELLEISSUE SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE AND THAT, IN FACT, FRENCH AND US VIEWS ON THE MATTER ARE NOT DISSIMILAR. THE FRENCH CONTINUE TO FEEL THAT THE PALESTINIANS THEMSELVES MUST DETERMINE WHAT THEIR FUTURE WILL BE AND IT IS IMMATERIAL TO FRANCE WHETHER THEY CHOOSE TO REMAIN WITH THE HASHEMITES, TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN STATE OR TO MAKE SOME OTHER ARRANGEMENT. FRANCE WILL MAKE NO EFFORT TO TRY TO INFLUENCE THE PALESTINIANS TOWARD ANY PARTICULAR SOLUTION. RESPONDING TO A FURTHER QUESTION, DE LA BELLEISSUE INDICATED THAT WHILE NO MEETING BETWEEN JOBERT AND PLO LEADER ARAFAT HAS BEEN SET, IT SHOULD NOT BE EXCLUDED THAT THE TWO MEN WILL MEET. SUCH AN ENCOUNTER WOULD NO MORE IMPLY FRENCH RECOGNITION OF THE PLO AS THE GOVERNMENT OF PALESTINE, HE SAID, THAN FRENCH DISCUSSIONS WITH FLN AT EVIAN HAD IMPLIED FRENCH RECOGNITION OF THE FLN AS THE GOVERNMENT OF ALGERIA.

4. WHEN WE MENTIONED PRESS REPORTS INDICATING JOBERT HAD SAID THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE GOING FASTER WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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FRANCE PRESENT, DE LA BELLEISSUE DISPLAYED SOME EMBARRASSMENT AND COMPLAINED ABOUT PRESS "DISTORTIONS" OF FRENCH POLICY TOWARD THE MIDDLE EAST. AT THE OUTSET OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, HE SAID, FRANCE HAD MADE CLEAR BOTH ITS UNHAPPINESS AT NOT BEING INCLUDED AND ITS VIEW THAT ANY PERMANENT SETTLEMENT WOULD REQUIRE INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEES, BUT SUBSEQUENTLY, FRANCE HAD DONE NOTHING TO IMPEDE THE NEGOTIATIONS IN ANY WAY. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WAS, IN FACT, DELIGHTED

WITH THE EGYPTIAN/ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT AND GREATLY APPRECIATES THE ROLE SECRETARY KISSINGER PL*YED THEREIN.

5. CLAIMING HE DID NOT YET KNOW THE SUBSTANCE OF JOBERT'S TALKS IN DAMASCUS, DE LA BELLEISSUE EXPRESSED THE OPINION THAT PRESIDENT ASSAD WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTIES BRINGING OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT AROUND TO HIS POSITION IN FAVOR OF SYRIAN PARTICIPATION AT GENEVA. DE LA BELLEISSUE BELIEVED ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO COMPROMISE ON ITS INSISTENCE THAT SYRIA HAND OVER A LIST OF POW'S BEFORE NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN. HE OBSERVED THAT MRS. MEIR'S RECENT STATEMENT THAT ISRAEL WOULD BE BE WILLING TO PULL BACK FROM AREAS CAPTURED IN THE OCTOBER WAR WAS IN REALITY AN AFFIRMATION THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT LEAVE SYRIAN TERRITORY TAKEN IN 1967. HE THOUGHT, NONETHELESS, THAT SYRIA WOULD EVENTUALLY GO TO GENEVA.

6. JOBERT WILL VISIT ONLY IRAQ (FEBRUARY 7/8) ON HIS NEXT TRIP TO THE NEAR EAST, DE LA BELLEISSUE SAID, AND PLANS TO MAKE ONE OR TWO OTHER TRIPS TO THE AREA BEFORE THE SUMMER. DE LA BELLEISSUE REPEATED THE QUAI LINE THAT A TRIP TO ISRAEL IS NOT EXCLUDED BUT ADDED THAT THIS IS HARDLY A PROPITIOUS MOMENT IN VIEW OF THE VIRULENT ARTICLES ISRAELI NEWSPAPERS ARE CARRYING AGAINST THE FRENCH, PARTICULARLY JOBERT. (THE SAME DAY, AN ISRAELI EMBASSY OFFICER TOLD US THE FRENCH HAVE MADE NO MENTION TO THE ISRAELIS THAT JOBERT MIGHT WISH TO VISIT JERUSALEM.)

7. COMMENT. THE INDICATION THAT JOBERT MAY MEET WITH ARAFAT, AS WELL AS THE QUAI'S INSISTENCE ON THE POLITICAL NATURE OF JOBERT'S TRAVELS, UNDERLINE THE FRENCH DETERMINATION TO GAIN PARTICIPATION IN MIDDLE EAST PEACE ARRANGEMENTS. THEY SEE SUCH CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTICIPATION AS VERY IMPORTANT BOTH TO FRENCH PRESTIGE AND INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND WITHIN EC AND TO THEIR HOPES FOR LARGE-SCALE ECONOMIC, COMMERCIAL AND MILITARY PENETRATION OF MARKETS THEY BELIEVE THEY NEED TO SOLVE FRANCE'S ENERGY PROBLEMS AND TO KEEP ECONOMY GROWING. IN TRYING TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS, THE FRENCH APPEAR TO BE WILLING TO TAKE ACTIONS THAT ARE INCIDENTALLY UNHELPFUL TO OUR STEP BY STEP EFFORTS TO MAKE PROGRESS ON THE ENERGY CRISIS AND A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. THESE INCLUDE JOBERT'S FORAYS INTO THE MIDDLE EAST, HIS BELITTILING OF THE PROSPECTS AT GENEVA AND THE FRENCH UN ENERGY PROPOSAL. HOW FAR THE FRENCH MAY BE PREPARED TO GO IS NOT YET CLEAR.
STONE

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